

Fr. Hugh's Homily for 7th Sunday of Easter Year A

None of us like suffering. None of us want the wounds that it leaves behind. In fact we often do our best to erase them or forget them. Yet, somehow the idea of suffering and being wounded runs through the story of Jesus and in a variety of ways through our own lives. Jesus suffered for us. We can often be the cause of our own suffering. But there is that strange phrase in the letter to the Hebrews that Jesus learn to obey through suffering, and when we portray the risen Jesus it is with his wounds, we do not airbrush them out.

The truth is that if we are brave enough not to run from our wounds, we learn a great deal from them. In a strange way they are part of our maturing process

Look at the scene in the first reading. When we read it, or listen to it, quickly, we do not see anything unusual about it. But just stop for a moment and count the number of apostles. How many? Only eleven. They are a deeply wounded community. (They have yet to appoint Matthias to make up their number.) For years they have been travelling with Judas Iscariot and seen him as part of their small community; the very community that Jesus has chosen to have around him. What could go wrong? And yet here they are having to deal with the fact that one of their brothers has betrayed them in the deepest way possible. Was it only Judas? Could they trust each other? Here they are praying with Mary, but very uncertain about their future. But they will become those apostles who are the foundation stones of the new Church.

And in our lives it is often the wounded who can help us most. There was a priest in another diocese who succumbed to alcoholism and had to take a long leave of absence, but he eventually was able to return to ministry. Because of what he had been through he became one of the most sympathetic confessors, and was in great demand.

Another person lost an adult child and went through all the trauma that brings. Part of which was all the assumptions others made about what had happened, which they felt happy to share with the grieving person. Yet in coming through that, though still badly wounded by the loss, they became someone that others could speak to and be helped by, just because they were so able to listen to others and empathise.

What makes it possible for us to know Jesus? The gospel says: 'eternal life is to know you, Father, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.'

We can approach Jesus because he is like so us. He has suffered one of the worst punishments a human can suffer. He is approachable and knowable because we see him not as some distant all-powerful God (which he also is), but as someone who was a victim, vulnerable, wounded, and without any power at all. Someone who knows what it is to suffer injustice and at the hands of bullies, even though innocent.

In John's gospel it is on the cross, the final stage of his suffering, when he seems most human, that he is then glorified and his Father glorified by him, because then God is most like us. Wounded, vulnerable, not in charge of his life.

But just as that wounded community of apostles would give birth to the Church, so then on that very cross, Jesus begins to give us what we need for the future. The sacraments, the Church and the Holy Spirit.

We often fear to be weak, we despise weakness. But from our weakness grows a true realisation of who we really are and how we are to follow Christ.

I was up at Dodding Green the other day and there are memories of the Cenacolo Community all around. And I was reminded that when you first entered the community you were taken right back to the simplest way of life. You surrendered your life to the community, and from there you grew afresh.

Each of us has our wounds, or they will come. It is inevitable. And yet, frightening as they are at times, once faced and accepted as part of our history, our make-up, they make us better people and more able to serve as Christ asks us to do.